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PITTSBURGH, PA.
JEWISH CHRONICLE

WEEKLY-12,542

JUN 23 1967

Sharp CIA And Navy Rift Bared In USS Liberty Probe

WASHINGTON (JTA) — The Defense Department said that it would make public a comprehensive report on the investigation of the accidental Israeli attack on the U.S.S. Liberty. A U.S. Navy court of inquiry convened at Valetta, Malta. The Liberty is now docked there for repairs.

Authoritative reports from high -- ranking naval officials said that the Liberty was jeopardized because it was under control of the Central Intelligence Agency although it was manned by naval personnel.

A number of civilians, said to be CIA personnel, were aboard at the time of the attack. The Navy position appears to be that the ship should not have been operated in the war zone in a clandestine manner but that normal Sixth Fleet command procedures ought to have been in effect.

The Naval Court, under Admiral Isaac C. Kidd, USN, "is inquiring into all aspects of the attack", the Defense Department said. The Department added that "many rumors and reports about the attacks have

been circulating." The statement said that "the Department of Defense has no evidence to support some of these rumors and reports. Others appear to be based on partial evidence. Some appear to be accurate on the basis of present information here, which is incomplete. Until the court has an opportunity to obtain the full facts, the Department of Defense will have no further comment."

Top-level sources here revealed a bitter confrontation between the Navy and the CIA. The Navy is said to maintain that had the Liberty been under normal Sixth Fleet command, a signal would have been dispatched to Israel and other combatants to alert them to the presence of an American naval vessel, of unusual appearance, in the war zone.

The CIA is said to have chosen to overrule the Navy's advice. Had the Navy procedural suggestions been heeded, the Israeli military command would have been alerted to the identity and location of the neutral ship.

According to these sources, the CIA wanted to use the vessel for electronic surveillance of the Israeli military radio system as well as the Arab armed forces radio and communications of the Soviet Navy. The Navy complaint is said to include a conviction that Israel could have been notified because the Israelis could have been trusted not to reveal the ship's operations to the Arabs or the Soviet Union.